



Lyme Disease

(tick-borne borreliosis, Lyme arthritis)

Health Education Facts

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by a bacterial infection transmitted by very small ticks, the most important being the deer tick and the western black-legged tick. Lyme disease may cause symptoms affecting skin, nervous system, heart and/or joints of an individual. About 20 cases a year have been reported in Kansas since 1990.

Why is it called Lyme disease?

The first cluster of disease cases associated with this bacteria was discovered near Lyme, Connecticut.

Who gets Lyme disease?

Males and females of all ages can get Lyme disease. People who spend time outdoors in tick-infested environments are at an increased risk of exposure. Most infected persons have reported an exposure to ticks or their woodland/brush habitat during the summer months when ticks are most active, but cases have been reported during every month of the year.

How is Lyme disease spread?

The bacteria that causes Lyme disease are part of a natural cycle of infected ticks feeding on animals such as mice, opossums, dogs or deer. Cases of Lyme disease have also been reported in dogs and horses. Ticks can feed on a human, and, if the tick is infected with the bacteria, can cause an infection. Person-to-person spread of Lyme disease does not occur.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

The illness usually occurs during the summer months and generally starts as a large circular reddish expanding rash around or near the site of the tick bite. Multiple rash sites may occur. During the rash stage, or occasionally prior to the rash, other symptoms such as fever, headache, fatigue, stiff neck, muscle and/or joint pain may be present. These may last for several weeks. If left untreated, within a few weeks to months after the rash onset, complications such as meningitis, facial palsy or heart abnormalities may occur. Swelling and pain in the large joints may recur over many years.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually appear within one month of the bite of the infected tick (range three to 31 days).

Does past infection make one immune?

Current information indicates reinfection is possible.

What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

Current therapy includes the use of antibiotics.

What can be done to prevent the spread of Lyme disease?

Special precautions to prevent exposure to ticks should be used such as wearing light-colored clothing and tucking pants into socks and shirts into pants. Repellents containing DEET applied to skin or clothing may prevent tick attachment. Use repellents sparingly and with caution, as they may cause adverse reactions in some individuals. Avoid application to damaged or exposed skin and avoid prolonged or excessive applications, especially in children. If exposed to tick-infested areas, family members should check body surface for attached ticks. The control of rodents around the home may be helpful.

How should a tick be removed?

To remove an attached tick, grasp with tweezers or forceps as close as possible to attachment (skin) site, and pull upward and out with a firm steady pressure. If tweezers are not available, use fingers shielded with tissue paper or rubber gloves. Do not handle with bare hands. Be careful not to squeeze, crush or puncture the body of the tick which may contain infectious fluids.

After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash hands. See or call a physician if there is concern about incomplete tick removal. It is important that a tick be removed as soon as it is discovered. Check after every three to four hours of outdoor activity for ticks attached to clothing or skin. If removal occurs within 24 hours after attachment, the risk of tick-borne infection is reduced. Do not try to remove ticks using Vaseline, lit cigarettes or other home remedies. Antibiotic treatment is not routinely recommended for tick bites.